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ABSTRACT

This document is a summary of Cypress College's Student Satisfaction Inventory, a nationally normed instrument used to measure student satisfaction on a range of college experiences. Just fewer than 500 students at Cypress College completed the summary in June 2001. Approximately half of the total population surveyed planned to transfer to another institution and 27 percent planned an associate's degree. The survey revealed that the scale of safety and security is very important to Cypress students, and that academic advising and counseling is crucial. As well, registration effectiveness appears to be very important, while the topic of admissions and financial aid appears less important to students, especially those who attend classes in the evening. Campus climate and a student-centered approach appeared to be less important to students. Students reported that the college's faculty and staff were among the institution's top strengths, and reported that the quality of instruction received in most classes is excellent, and that faculty are knowledgeable in their fields. Students also listed the following areas that need improvement: more convenient class schedules, better campus safety and security, more knowledgeable academic advisors, and a greater amount of student parking space. (CB)

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Marketing Communications Analysis: Summary of Cypress College's Student Satisfaction Inventory

Introduction

We regularly incorporate the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory into our analysis of an institution's market positioning for two reasons:

1. Current students can tell us what the institution is doing well, providing a solid foundation for marketing messages. Strong ratings on specific aspects of the educational product allow us to market with confidence. We know that the college can deliver on what is promised.

2. Current students also can reveal product areas needing work. We may discover critical product elements that are functioning below standard and need to be addressed before they can be marketed. It is unwise to "sell" product areas that are deficient, simply because research shows they are desirable to students - that kind of strategy ultimately leads to retention and credibility issues.

The Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) is a nationally normed instrument used to measure student satisfaction on a range of college experiences. It is a unique instrument in that it measures both satisfaction and importance. Importance scores provide a context and framework for analysis and planning. For example, a low satisfaction score on an item may not indicate it should be a priority for improvement if the item was not rated highly in importance to students. True strengths of the institution will be those items which not only rated highly in satisfaction but those that also were of higher importance to students.

The following summary begins by addressing the "scales" or broad topics under which the individual "items" reside. Next, individual items from the instrument are discussed in the context of institutional strengths and opportunities for improvement.

The SSI was completed by 486 students at Cypress College in June of 2001. Approximately 28% of those surveyed reported Asian or Pacific Islander ethnicity, 18% Hispanic, 32% Caucasian, 5% African-American, and 17% other or prefer not to respond. The survey was administered to 245 predominantly daytime attending students and 241 evening students, though 30% of the "evening" students reported they were enrolled in classes during the daytime. Approximately half (51%) of the total population surveyed planned to transfer to another institution, 27% planned an associates degree, and 15% provided no response on the educational goal question. A majority of students, 77% work part or full-time—even 69% of the day students. As anticipated, 68% of day students reported a full-time class load vs. 39% of evening students.

The SSI should be administered every two to three years to compare results and note areas of progress and/or continued problems. Scales of importance and institutional strengths supported with focus group comments provide the foundation for key benefit messages in

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marketing Cypress College to prospective students. Weaknesses should be addressed in order of importance and monitored for improvement.

What is most important to Cypress College students?

SSI scales of importance – Cypress day student rank order vs. evening student ranking and vs. national two-year public institution ranking *

	Cypress Aggregate Ranking	Day Students	Evening Students	Nat'l Norm
1	Safety and Security	2	1	6
2	Academic Advising/Counseling	1	2	3
3	Instructional Effectiveness	3	4	1
4	Registration Effectiveness	4	3	2
5	Academic Services	5	6	5
6	Concern for the Individual	6	5	4
7	Admissions and Financial Aid	7	10	7
8	Campus Climate	9	9	8
9	Service Excellence	8	7	10
10	Student Centeredness	10	8	9
11	Campus Support Services	11	11	11

The scale of safety and security is very important to Cypress students, which may be related to focus group comments indicating lingering concerns about campus safety and the effectiveness of security personnel. Academic advising and counseling is important to students at community colleges, but even more crucial for students at Cypress College. Nationally, students rank instructional effectiveness and registration effectiveness as most important. The topic of admissions and financial aid appears less important to Cypress evening students while service excellence is more important to daytime students. Campus climate and student centeredness are of higher importance to evening students.

Faculty and staff among top institutional strengths

Institutional Strengths—Items of Greatest Satisfaction (5.3+) AND High Importance (6.0+) in order of importance:

- The quality of instruction received in most classes is excellent
- Able to experience intellectual growth here
- Faculty are knowledgeable in their fields
- Library resources are adequate
- Policies and procedures regarding registration and course selection are clear and well-publicized
- Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours
- On the whole, the campus is well-maintained
- Library staff are helpful and approachable
- It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus
- Students are made to feel welcome

Though there is always room for improvement between importance and satisfaction, Cypress can move forward with several strengths in its communications to prospective students. As mentioned in the focus groups, the high quality and accessibility of faculty at Cypress is an asset to the institution. Student satisfaction with their ability to experience intellectual growth shows Cypress is achieving success in one of the most important missions of higher education. Library resources received a few negative comments in the focus groups—it appears that this is not a problem for the student body across the board. Students report enjoying their experience and feeling welcome, this indicates the commitment of the staff, faculty and administrators to service excellence. In the focus groups there were several anecdotes where staff, despite resource issues and physical plant issues, went out of their way to assist students.

We would like to see items regarding advising among the top institutional strengths. Satisfaction scores on important advising items hovered around (4.8-5.0) and were slightly higher among evening students. According to students in the focus groups, some advisors are good and others provide incorrect information. Some had no idea who their advisor was and had not used academic advising. Due to the physical layout of campus many services other than academic advising, such as aptitude or career services, are not always apparent to students who are struggling or undecided.

Areas needing improvement

Cross-section of items rated highest in importance (6.0+) and large performance gaps (1.2+) in order of importance:

- Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient
- Classes needed to complete program are offered frequently enough**
- The campus is safe and secure for all students
- Parking lots are well-lighted and secure
- Academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements
- Classes needed to complete program not offered at conflicting times during semester**
- Advisor helps me set goals to work toward
- Amount of student parking space on campus is adequate
- Cypress offers all the classes needed to complete program within established timeframe**
- Students are notified early in the term is doing poorly in a class
- Equipment in lab facilities is kept up to date
- Security staff respond quickly
- Academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual
- The college shows concern for students as individuals

**Denotes "custom" item unique to Cypress College

Most of the items above relate to three areas, class availability, safety and security (including parking) and academic advising. Course availability and scheduling is critical for a student body with so many other obligations including work and home responsibilities. Students in the focus groups reported problems with classes being cancelled. Students intending to transfer may leave earlier than planned if they are frustrated in registering for required and sequenced courses. These students may also experience difficulty when transferring in that their course transcripts may be incomplete. With the high number of high school students planning bachelors and graduate degrees an important message and selling point of Cypress should be the preparation for and ease of transfer to four-year institutions.

Safety issues, particularly the presence of security staff were also mentioned in the focus groups. As mentioned previously under strengths, issues regarding advising should be given high priority. Students expect assistance with planning their goals. Focus group comments were mixed on this subject. It may be the sheer number of students vs. counselors. Where students are highly satisfied in a few areas, those "best practices" should be gathered and additional training provided.

Additionally for daytime enrolled students at Cypress, there was a relatively large gap between importance and satisfaction regarding faculty providing timely feedback about student progress in a course. For evening students, computer lab adequacy and accessibility access to services during evening hours, and business office hours need improvement. Access to labs and services is critical for Cypress College's busy students.

Summary

Cypress College can proceed to market several strengths with confidence. The strengths fit well with the strengths uncovered in the focus groups on campus. Those strengths include the opportunities for intellectual growth, the excellent and accessible faculty, the high quality instruction provided, the welcoming and caring staff, and the attractive campus.

As Cypress administrators, staff and faculty work on issues students reported, the list of benefits to promote will strengthen and grow. Unfettered access is key for working students. Those who have specific goals and timelines expect to be able to finish their programs in sequence and on time. Those who are not sure or need to change their goals expect to be supported and mentored with valid, up-to-date information along the way. Over the next five to ten years traditional students will look more like non-traditional students. Cypress College's current diverse, working student market is at the forefront of the demographic trends to be seen across the country. With some work on the above issues, Cypress will serve these students better than other institutions who are not set up to offer courses and services for working adults.

It is critical that Cypress initiate better communication across campus on both improvements underway, strengths reported and any awards, accolades, faculty/industry ties and success stories or outcomes happening in the various departments. Students, administrators, faculty and staff are all ambassadors of Cypress. Quality internal communication is as important as external communication.

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